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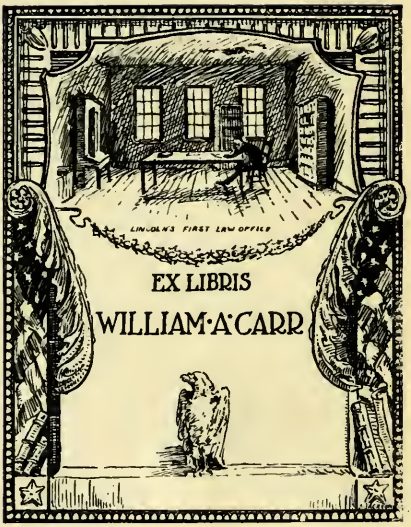
A. J. CONANT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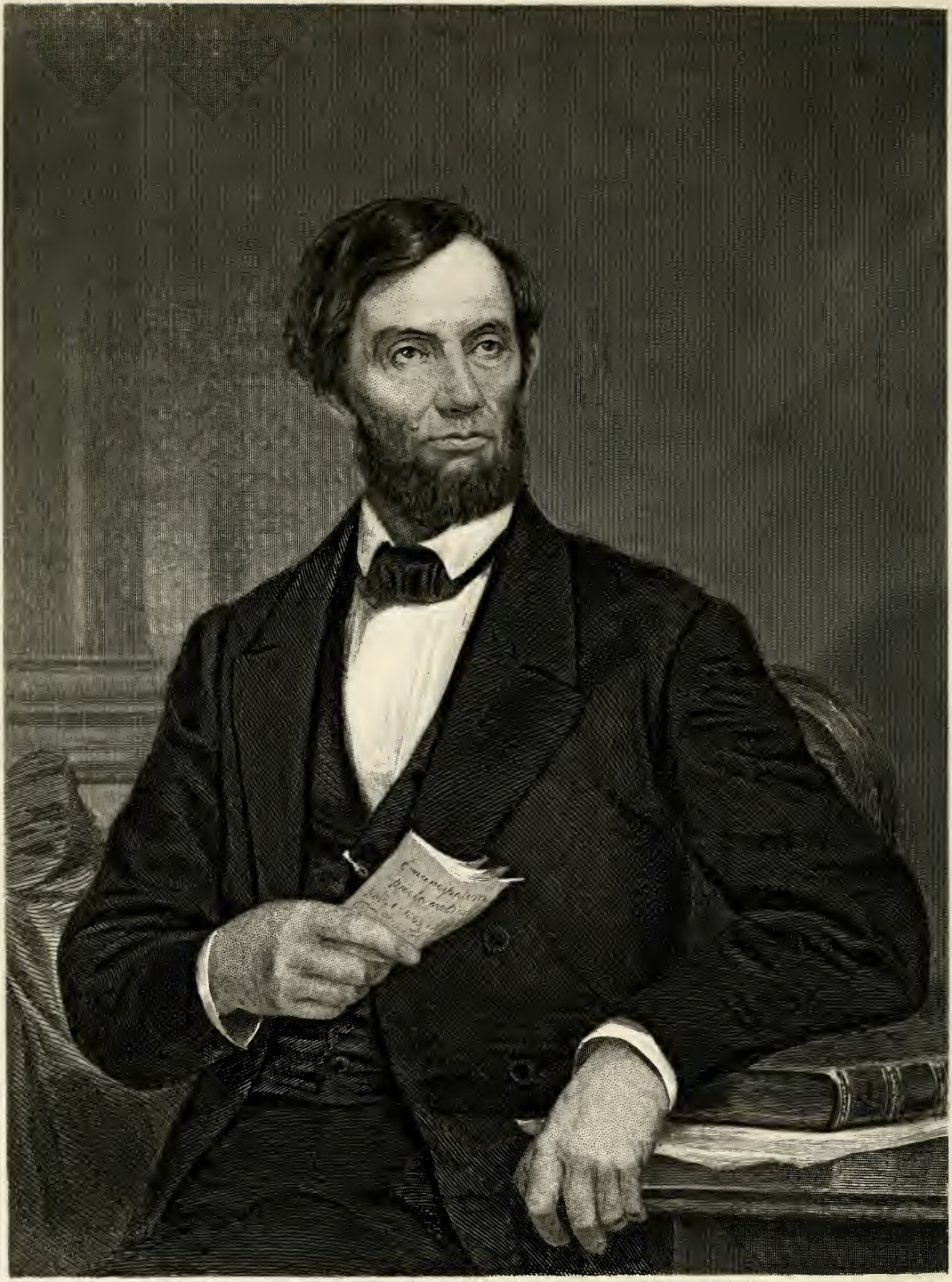

A. Lincoln

MY ACQUAINTANCE WITH ABRAHAM LINCOLN.

BY ALBAN JASPER CONANT.

WHETHER much or little in the following notes on Abraham Lincoln may be new to the general reader, or what measure of agreement there may be in them, as far as they go, with the many biographies that have been published, I have no idea, because of the biographies I have read not one, and probably never shall do so.

When, with the St. Louis Old Guard, the last time we were under arms, I followed his body to the tomb at Springfield, and the last sad rites were concluded, the bright picture which hangs in my memory received its last touches. Whatever may be wanting, to me it is complete, and must never be disturbed. From that time I can only think of him as I knew him. However limited my acquaintance with him may have been, compared with that of others, there was enough in its varied incidents from which to construct for myself, at least, the bright and living image of that unique personality whose name will be forever enshrined with all the best-beloved of the sons of men.

My acquaintance with Mr. Lincoln began in this wise: In the year 1860, about two months before the presidential election, I was requested by the Hon. William M. McPherson, of St. Louis, to go to Springfield and paint the portrait of the standard-bearer of the new Republican party. In compliance therewith, I went at once, presented my letters of introduction, and made an appointment for the first sitting at ten o'clock the following morning, at his

office, which was then a large room in the old State House. I was much puzzled to decide what view of his face was most desirable for my purpose. His features were irregular and angular—the line of the nose was straight on one side and slightly curved on the other; the lower lip on the right side was fuller than on the left, as if swollen from a blow or the sting of an insect; while the lines of the lower part of his face met in sharp angles on each side of his mouth. Above all, the heavy mass of black hair, which was quite long, stood out from his head in a very obstinate way, except where it fell over his forehead, which I discovered was very beautiful and symmetrical. I would add also that when his features were in perfect repose his expression was sad and thoughtful. This was intensified by the drooping of the under lid, showing the white of the eye below the iris.

Punctual to the moment, he left the table, on which lay a bushel of letters which he and his secretary were busy in answering, and, with a martyr-like resignation, sat down in the position I had indicated. But how melancholy he looked! When I first saw him standing amongst a group of friends, all in animated conversation, his face was beaming with good nature, its sharp angles had melted into graceful curves, and his expression was charming. It was this expression I earnestly desired to represent. How to call it forth at will, and keep it in play long enough to delineate it, was a problem. I saw I must make him forget the present. So I began by speaking of my indebtedness to him for the pleasure and instruction I had received from reading his speeches (all of which had been published as they were delivered) in his joint debate with Stephen A. Douglas. He replied: "In all my life I never engaged in any enterprise with such reluctance and grave apprehension as in that contest; but my political friends insisted, and I was forced to comply. Douglas was the idol of his party, and justly so, for he was a man of great ability. One element of his power as a public speaker was the imperious and emphatic style of his oratory. He was so vigorous and commanding in his manner that whatever he said was generally received without question. 'Judge Douglas said so' clinched the argument and ended the controversy. I soon found that my simple denial carried no weight against his emphatic utterances. You must remember that we addressed the same audience at each meeting, alternating as to the opening

speech. Mr. Douglas had said again and again that while I was in Congress I had, with the rest of the Whig members, voted against the Mexican war, which the Whig party strenuously opposed; that I had voted against all resolutions of thanks, presentation of swords, and Congressional recognition of the gallant conduct of those who had periled their lives in that war. False as it all was, I knew a simple denial would do no good; so I waited for an opportunity when I could back my denial with such proof as would settle that question forever. On a certain occasion, when Mr. Douglas had made the opening speech, I saw near the platform a Democrat, a personal friend of both of us, who was in Congress when I was. When, in my reply, I came to the oft-repeated statements about the Mexican war, I made a pointed denial, and told the audience that when I went to Congress the Mexican war was all over; therefore I could not have voted against it. And furthermore, that on every resolution of votes of swords and thanks to the officers and soldiers I voted in the affirmative, except on one occasion, when the question of an appropriation was introduced for the purpose of bringing home a few (one hundred and fifty, perhaps) soldiers still in Mexico. The resolution was so shrewdly worded that if the Whigs voted for it they would be made to indorse the war. Then I voted 'No' until Mr. Ashmun, of Massachusetts, added this amendment—'In a war unjustifiably begun by the President of the United States'; then I voted in the affirmative. And I added: 'I refer you for the proof to the Congressional Record, where these transactions are recorded.' Then turning to my Democratic colleague, I said: 'Here is Ficklin, who was in Congress when I was; he will confirm what I have said.' He seemed rather reluctant to come; but as he was within reach of my long arm, I took him by his collar and helped him along a little. He ascended the platform, and, facing the audience, said: 'Although I am opposed to Mr. Lincoln in politics, I must say that what he has told you concerning his votes on the Mexican war question is true.' Mr. Douglas never said Mexican war again during the rest of the campaign."

There are many incidents in Mr. Lincoln's history which illustrate this remarkable trait of his character—the patient waiting, biding his time, no matter how strong the pressure might be to hasten his decisions or precipitate his action. Many will remem-

ber how much the question of the emancipation of the slaves was discussed and urgently insisted on by some long before it took place; but nothing moved him from the course his own judgment dictated. A member of his cabinet told me, some time after the proclamation was issued, that the cabinet knew absolutely nothing of his purpose until just before the event, when he presented at a meeting of the cabinet a draft of the document for their verbal criticism only.

Pursuant to my purpose of diverting his attention from those subjects which made him look sad, I alluded at one of his sittings to certain charges which had been made against him by those who opposed his election, one of which was that formerly he had been engaged in the whisky trade. He replied: "When I was in the grocery business at Salem, money was scarce, and I was obliged to receive in exchange for my goods all kinds of farm produce. When a sufficient quantity had accumulated it was loaded on to a flat-boat and sent to New Orleans, and traded off for further supplies. On one of these trips a neighbor of mine asked me to take along three barrels of whisky with my freight and sell them for him. This I did, and that was the only whisky transaction of my life."

But such incidents served only a temporary purpose. Visitors were coming from everywhere; his time was much occupied with receiving and entertaining them. Such interruptions were very frequent, and, of course, to me quite annoying. So I placed a long bench against the wall behind me, on which the visitors were invited to sit. This helped not only to keep him in position for the time, but prolonged the animated expression of his face. One day, when no visitors were present, I asked him about his early life—how he came to be a lawyer, etc. The narrative which he gave in reply was very interesting. The limits of this article will permit a brief relation only of a few of its incidents.

"When I went into the grocery business," Mr. Lincoln said, "I had a partner for a while; but I soon found that he absorbed most of the profits, so I bought him out and went on alone. During that time I was appointed postmaster. My duties were not very heavy, for the mail was brought only twice a week by a boy on horseback. When a change in the administration occurred, another man was appointed postmaster two miles away, but I was never removed. So you see," said Mr. Lincoln, laughing, "I am

postmaster there still." Among the incidents of his earlier life which Mr. Lincoln related on that occasion, none was, to me, so interesting and suggestively impressive as that one simple event which, although happening in the ordinary course of trivial business transactions, nevertheless became the pivotal point of his life, and, in fact, so to speak, the regeneration of his whole being. This is the way he told the story:

"One day a man who was migrating to the West drove up in front of my store with a wagon which contained his family and household plunder. He asked me if I would buy an old barrel, for which he had no room in his wagon, and which he said contained nothing of special value. I did not want it, but to oblige him I bought it, and paid him, I think, half a dollar for it. Without further examination, I put it away in the store and forgot all about it. Some time after, in overhauling things, I came upon the barrel, and emptying it upon the floor to see what it contained, I found at the bottom of the rubbish a complete edition of Blackstone's Commentaries. I began to read those famous works, and I had plenty of time; for, during the long summer days, when the farmers were busy with their crops, my customers were few and far between. The more I read"—this he said with unusual emphasis—"the more intensely interested I became. Never in my whole life was my mind so thoroughly absorbed. I read until I devoured them. In the succeeding fall I was appointed a delegate to the Whig convention, which met at Springfield, where I was called upon for a speech. After the adjournment Judge —— said to me, 'Mr. Lincoln, why don't you practise law?' I replied that I had never thought of doing so, as I had never studied law. 'But,' said the judge, 'you have eminent qualifications for a lawyer, and if you will come to Springfield and read law in the office of —— [naming the firm] for six months, at the next term of the court, in the spring, I will admit you to the bar.' This opened up a new life to me. I sold out my grocery, came here, studied law for six months with the firm he named, and at the next term of the court was admitted to the bar."

At a subsequent sitting it became necessary to resort to other tactics to dissipate the settled seriousness of his countenance. I noted the character of the stories he often told, and when he became silent I drew from my own memory, from time to time, such

as I judged would amuse him. One of them afterward became well known as the "Slow-Horse Story," which he often repeated. It effected what I desired, for he laughed long and heartily over it.

On his memorable journey to Washington to enter upon the duties of his office, when he arrived at Buffalo or Cleveland—I have forgotten which—he was called on for a speech. Standing on the rear platform of the last car, he began an address, and by way of illustration of some point he commenced the "horse story." But before the climax was reached, or anything ludicrous suggested even, the train started, and of course the story was unfinished.

One morning in June, 1861, a member of the cabinet, whose guest I was at the time, invited me to call with him on the President, adding that if I went alone I might be compelled to wait a long time for my turn to be admitted, whereas cabinet officers entered unannounced along with whomsoever might accompany them. On our entering the President greeted me cordially, and remarked: "I can never forget you; you told me one of the best stories I ever heard." Then, turning to the general, he said: "Did you know that I am indebted to this man for that 'Slow-Horse Story'?" The general replied: "Mr. President, you tell so many stories that it would be difficult to remember their origin." When we left the White House the general remarked: "He tells too many stories—disgusting sometimes."

Some weeks after this the President and numerous high officials, with many others, were assembled at the Navy-Yard to witness the testing of a new breech-loading gun. While Captain Dahlgren, who had charge of the matter, was busy with preparations for the test, Mr. Lincoln, standing in the midst of the group, was bowing and shaking hands with those whom he recognized. When he looked in the direction where I stood, as in duty bound I raised my hat with the rest. Presently he looked at me again, and stretching out his long arm and grasping my hand, he said: "I am glad to see you. I shall never forget you." Then, addressing those about him, he said: "I am indebted to my friend here for one of the best stories I ever heard." Whereupon a stately gentleman, immaculately dressed, said in slow and measured tones: "Mr. President, if the story was so fine, suppose you give it to us while we are waiting for the gun." Mr. Lincoln began the story, but, alas! before the climax was reached his voice was silenced by

the roar of the cannon, and there it ended. The story is as follows—the words in italics are Mr. Lincoln's embellishments:

A certain politician who was a candidate for the office of county judge applied one morning to a neighbor who kept a livery-stable for a horse and buggy to take himself and friend to the nominating convention, which was to be held in an adjoining town, sixteen miles away, in the evening. He told the liveryman to be sure and give him the best and fastest horse he had, *so that he could get there in time to do a little log-rolling before the meeting.* His neighbor, *being of opposing politics*, gave him a horse that promised well at the start, but broke down entirely before he got there. When he arrived the convention had adjourned, and of course he lost the nomination. On driving up to the stable late in the afternoon of the following day, feeling it was useless to be angry at the trick played upon him, he said to the owner: "See here, Jones. You are training this horse for the New York market. You expect to sell him for a good price to an undertaker for a hearse horse." The owner protested that he was one of his best livery horses. "Now don't deny it," said the would-be judge, "for I know by his gait that you have spent a great deal of time training him to go before a hearse. But it 's all labor lost. He will never do. He is altogether too slow; he could n't get a corpse to the cemetery in time for the resurrection."

Some, no doubt, will be unable to perceive anything very amusing in the story; but I have ventured to give it at such length because it will serve to elucidate a phase of Mr. Lincoln's mind which he possessed in a larger measure than any other man I ever knew. I can think of no name that expresses it. It was vastly more than what is termed the sense for the ludicrous. His perceptive faculties were not only quick as a flash, but broad and penetrating, taking in the whole picture at one glance, which, for the most of us, must be regarded in sections before it is comprehended as a whole. When a humorous point is made in an address before a promiscuous assembly, it will usually happen that some will respond to the humor immediately, while the laugh of others will come along successively, according to their individual capacity of perception; and some, indeed, will miss it altogether. Thus, in the story above related, I believe there was before Mr. Lincoln's mind the whole picture in all its details—the grave, disappointed

candidate, the horse moving on through the ages with the corpse, yet at a gait so slow that the end of all things comes to pass while he is still on the journey, and the corpse arrives too late for the resurrection. The idea of a slower movement is hardly conceivable; and it was this point of the story which served his purpose so well—as some will remember—in his characterization of the movements of certain military commanders during the first years of the war.

That he had few equals as a story-teller everybody knows. His reputation in this particular, when he was practising law in the widely separated districts of the then Western territories, was as extensive as his practice, and his coming was not unfrequently the signal for a gathering of the people to listen to his exhaustless humor. Nor should the truth be denied or extenuated that sometimes his stories were such as to give much offense to refined and sensitive minds by their grossness and indelicacy. The surprise which this statement is calculated to produce will be dispelled when we think of such an absorbent and humorously exuberant nature as his, subjected, as it was, during all the earlier years of his life to those contaminating associations which are the growth of the peculiar conditions of pioneer life,—which need not be mentioned here,—whose baneful influences I sometimes think are far more debasing to the minds of the young than those which beset them in a large city. Those born and bred in a remote country village, or reared on the farm with the "hired help," will know what I mean. Those things stuck to him like a scar, and, regarded alone, bore the stamp of impurity. But when these stories—those even which can never be printed, and which few who heard them will ever repeat—are considered in the light of what has been said respecting his humorous faculties, it will be seen that there was in them, to his mind, some striking touch of nature, emphasized often by their gross absurdity, which gave to each such illustrative point and power as to elevate it entirely above the level of vulgarity. Such seeming blemishes were only the barnacles which cling to the surface of the hull, not the hidden parasites which destroy the oaken timbers of the ship, and at last send her to the bottom of the ocean.

At one of the sittings, when the subject of Yankee wit was mentioned, Mr. Lincoln remarked: "That is a thing which I always

admired and coveted." Some one responded: "Why, Mr. Lincoln, you certainly have the credit of possessing it in large measure." "No," said he, "not the genuine. I don't remember that I ever got credit for it but once. I was passing through the court-room one day in a great hurry while a trial was in progress of a man charged with assault and battery. As he had no counsel, the judge ordered me to defend him. The witness had testified that the accused fought the complainant all over the field. Being in a hurry, I thought I would badger the witness a little in the cross-examination, so as to lighten the punishment as much as possible, and submit the case. After the few usual questions, I asked him:

"'How large was that field—twenty acres?'

"'No.'

"'Ten acres?'

"'No.'

"'Were there two acres?'

"'Yes,' he answered, 'just about two acres.'

"'And you saw him fight the other man all over the field?'

"'Yes, sir.'

"'Well, sir,' I inquired, 'did you ever see a fight before that turned out so little to the acre?' He replied, with a grin, that he never had. Both judge and jury seemed amused; and all the speech I made was that the crop was so poor it was not worth while to spend further time in its cultivation, and then submitted the case to the jury, who fined him two dollars and a half and let him go, when he ought to have been sent to the penitentiary. Some of my friends said it was Yankee wit, but it was the only time that I remember to have got credit for it. I always wished I had it."

As before stated, people from everywhere almost—editors, lawyers, politicians, and the rest—were continually calling upon him. Among them was a gentleman from Alabama, in personal appearance a fine type of a Southern gentleman. His mission seemed to be to learn what the policy of the government would be if Mr. Lincoln should be elected. During the interview, which was quite long, he scarcely changed his position or once removed his earnest gaze from Mr. Lincoln's face. When he left he looked dissatisfied, and more anxious than when he came. Of the conversation, which I was not supposed to hear, I took no note, but Mr. Lincoln's

manner, then as well as on similar occasions, impressed me quite unfavorably. There was, to my thinking, too much story-telling levity—not dissimulation, surely, but an apparent lack of appreciation of the gravity and responsibilities of his position. I wondered why he seemed to evade the discussion of the problems of those feverish times, which burdened the souls of men, and sometimes even to dismiss them with a joke. Afterward I saw clearly the wisdom of his course, but at that time I had painful misgivings as to his capacity and qualifications for the high office for which he had been nominated.

Mr. Lincoln's womanly tenderness of heart was strikingly illustrated in his considerate sympathy with children. No matter how gravely occupied he might be, when children approached he was a child himself again. One afternoon, when none but ourselves were present, he busy with his correspondence and I with my work, a ragged, barefooted boy crept softly up the stairs, and, peering timidly around the edge of the open door, looked with manifest awe at Mr. Lincoln. Busy as he was, he heard the soft step, and telling him to come in, among other simple questions, asked him his name. The boy answered, "My name is Folks." "Well," said Mr. Lincoln, "that 's wrong. Don't you see that you are only one, and folks means more than one? Tell your father that I say your name should be Folk. Good-by, sir," giving him another hearty shake of the hand. In the course of an hour another dirty, shabby little fellow came softly to the door, and met with the same kindly reception. In answer to the question as to *his* name, he replied, "Knotts." "Well," said Mr. Lincoln, "if here is n't another mistake! You are but one. Your name should be Knott, not Knotts, which means more than one." With a shake of the hand and a cheery good-by, he resumed his pen, and, with his left hand, his exercises with his refractory hair.

When my study was finished, Mrs. Lincoln, with others, was invited to look at it. She came in, leading her son, little "Tad," and a playmate whom he called "Jim." I could see that Tad was the idol of his father. His admiring eye followed him wherever he went, as he charged around the room like a young colt, looking into everything, his mother capturing him now and then and holding him in check, from whom he would break away again at every opportunity. A brother artist was painting a portrait of Mr. Lin-

coln at the same time; but as his sketch was not sufficiently advanced to exhibit, it was turned face to the wall. Tad, watching his opportunity, darted to the canvas, and, turning it round far enough to see what it was, exclaimed to his little playmate, "Come here, Jim; here 's another Old Abe!" As several distinguished gentlemen were present, among them the Secretary of State and the State Auditor, I affected not to notice the rude speech of the child; but Mr. Lincoln, laughing heartily, said: "Did you hear that, Conant? He got that on the street, I suppose." When Mrs. Lincoln looked at the study she said: "Oh, that is excellent! That 's the way he looks when he has his friends about him. I hope he will look like that after the first of November" (alluding to the election), which last remark I thought was witty and bright. Irrelevant though it be, I venture to say that in all I saw of Mrs. Lincoln then, and more afterward, in Washington, she won my hearty respect and sympathy; and, from some things which came to my own knowledge, I believe there were few who were so circumstanced as to be able to appreciate the difficulties of her position or to realize what she had to endure.

When I was leaving for my home, Mr. Lincoln followed me to the door, and having said good-by to my little daughter, who was with me, taking me by the hand and drawing me gently back, so that she could not hear, he asked, with unaffected pathos in his voice, "Is her mother living?" On my answering in the affirmative, he said: "I am so glad to know it! Somehow I had got the idea that she was an orphan, and I was afraid to ask about her mother for fear I might hurt her feelings."

As far as the musical faculty was concerned, I have an impression that Nature was rather sparing in her endowment of Mr. Lincoln. Of this, however, I speak with diffidence, inasmuch as, within my own personal knowledge, there is but one incident on which to base an opinion. If my impression shall be confirmed, then to Shakspere's dictum concerning "the man who hath no music in his soul" Mr. Lincoln was a striking exception. The incident referred to was this: When the lifelong friend of Mr. Lincoln, the gallant Colonel Baker, who fell at Ball's Bluff, came to Washington with his California regiment, it was marched to the White House to be reviewed by the President. The regiment, fourteen hundred strong, made a fine display; every man was a returned

Californian. It was accompanied by two bands of music, one leading, the other bringing up the rear. As the soldiers countermarched on their return, the two bands came together in front of the President, each playing different tunes. Such discordant clangor I never heard; it was insufferable. Colonel Baker was terribly annoyed. Spurring his horse, he dashed into the midst of the musicians, brandishing his sword over their heads and shouting until the din was stopped. When the soldiers marched away he rode up to the President, exclaiming: "That was horrible! It annoyed me greatly." "What?" inquired Mr. Lincoln. "Why, the blundering in the music—those two bands coming together," said the colonel. "Oh, that 's nothing. It did n't disturb *me* in the least; *I* did not notice it," was the President's reply.

It will be remembered that after one of the great battles near Washington, in the early history of the war, the wounded soldiers were brought to the city by thousands. The demand for hospitals was so urgent that Secretary Stanton ordered several church edifices to be fitted up for the purpose. Floors were laid on top of the pews, on which the cots were placed for the wounded and dying soldiers. If I am not mistaken, it was the purpose to take only the houses of worship of those congregations whose disloyalty was most pronounced. Mr. Lincoln was a regular attendant at the Rev. Dr. Gurley's church; his pew was the first or second in front of the pulpit. I shall never forget the dismay with which many of the gathering congregation regarded the huge piles of lumber all about the building on the Sunday following the order of the Secretary of War. Could it be possible that Secretary Stanton meant to take this church also for a hospital? As soon as the benediction was pronounced, the President left his pew, and, rapidly ascending the platform, sat down on the sofa beside Dr. Gurley and engaged in an animated conversation. The next day, I think it was, the lumber was removed. When the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church met in St. Louis in 1866, it was my pleasure to receive as a guest this loved and most estimable divine, for whose valued ministrations, not only in public, but more especially when a storm of unspeakable sorrow desolated my home, I can never be sufficiently grateful. Among the many incidents referred to in our interviews was the one just related. I asked him what the President said to him on that occasion. He

replied: "He told me that he knew nothing of the intention of the Secretary of War to take my church for a hospital until he saw the preparations for it, and that I should feel no uneasiness about the matter, for he would see that it went no further; I should not be disturbed."

Thus far these notes have been limited to personal experiences and observations. I shall take the liberty, however, to repeat briefly one of the stories which Dr. Gurley related on that occasion, because it brings out so clearly the remarkable tenderness, "the melting charity," of Mr. Lincoln's heart. To those familiar with the history of the war it is well known that the Confederates devised many schemes for the capture of Washington and the officers of the government. In the execution of one of these plans their forces had got as near as Tenallytown before they were discovered and repelled. Some of the attacking party were captured, among whom was a young man—I think an only son—whose parents were esteemed members of Dr. Gurley's church. He had been active in the plot, and when captured was acting as a leader of the conspiracy. These, with other circumstances, made his crime so atrocious that on his trial no defense was possible, and he was condemned to death. "The father called on me," said the doctor, "in the greatest distress about the fate of his son, spoke of the agony of his mother, and begged me to go with him to the President and add my voice to his in the effort to induce him to commute the punishment of his son to imprisonment for life. Of course I went. While the President's heart was much moved by the father's distress, he told him plainly that he had grave doubts as to whether or not he would be justified in granting his petition, at least so soon after the conviction of his son of so great a crime, when his guilt was so manifest. The result was, however, that, in addition to the commutation of the sentence, Mr. Lincoln gave the father an order on the keeper of the Old Capitol Prison to permit the parents to visit and minister to the comfort of their son according to their own pleasure. About two or three weeks afterward," continued Dr. Gurley, "the father came again to entreat me to go with him to the President and join him in a petition for a pardon for the boy. I was much surprised that he should be in such haste, in view of all the circumstances, and strongly objected. I told him he was too fast; his son was safe, he had furnished his

room and supplied him with every comfort, he and the mother could visit him as often as they chose, and the best policy was to wait a while, etc. But he would take no denial, so I went with him. To the father's request Mr. Lincoln replied: 'Mr. ——, your son was convicted of the gravest possible crime, the just penalty of which is death. Had he succeeded in his scheme, the executive officers of this government would have been captured and perhaps the government itself destroyed. I have commuted his sentence from a death on the gallows to imprisonment, giving you every facility for ministering to his comfort. I have already done more for him than many will approve. At present, at least, I am sure I would not be justified in doing more. Your persistent applications have pained and annoyed me. If you do not cease, I may have cause to regret the clemency I have already shown.' Of course," said Dr. Gurley, "there was nothing for me to say, and we left. Not long afterward I called upon the President on some other matter, which was soon adjusted. On leaving the room, as I reached the door Mr. Lincoln asked me to wait a minute. After writing a few moments, he handed me a slip of paper, with the remark: 'Will you please give this to Mr. ——? Ever since he was here with you, the other day, about a pardon for his son I have felt grieved that I had to be so severe with him, and I fear I hurt his feelings so.' The paper was an order on the prison keeper to deliver the son to his father on condition that he be kept at home, and on no account to leave the city."

In considering the story of the life of Abraham Lincoln, we look in vain for a parallel in the histories of mankind. So circumstanced, from his lowly birth in the log cabin until he entered upon public life, as to be deprived of the meager advantages which even the common schools of the thinly settled West supplied, yet following one steadfast course in his pursuit of knowledge, with quick perceptions, a never-failing memory, and with such reflective powers of intellect as enabled him to retain, digest, and transmute into his own intellectual life all that he acquired, he became at length what he was—a prince of self-made men, a Melchisedek in the priesthood of humanity.

But how shall we account for such a phenomenon as Lincoln? Would he ever have been a lawyer if he had not stumbled, so to speak, upon that copy of Blackstone's Commentaries? Would he

have been President if he had not first been a lawyer? Would the discipline his mind received in the course he pursued have been possible in the usual methods of preparatory study for the bar, or could he thus have compassed that well-considered and thorough acquisition of the fundamental principles of all jurisprudence, by whose equipment he was prepared to grapple successfully with the profoundest questions that ever confronted or imperiled the national life? Were all these concurrent events the effect of mere chance or the ordinary evolutionary processes of nature? Or was there, indeed, in all, and over all, a Supreme Intelligence directing every stage of the development of his life, from the obscure boy to the mighty ruler of the nation?

Each will answer according to his creed. Of Mr. Lincoln's own opinion I think there can be but little doubt. His constant attendance upon public worship, where none was more reverential, counts for something. In those dark days when

"Unmerciful disaster followed fast, and followed faster,"

who so steadfast as he? With armies defeated, councils divided, friends losing heart and full of fears for the future, courageously, steadily he pursued his way, strong in his faith that God reigned over the nations, and that the right must surely prevail. In his farewell address at Springfield, in public affairs and documents, wherever it was appropriate, his recognition of dependence upon the Almighty is devoutly expressed. Of the soul-life of Mr. Lincoln his pastor knew more, probably, than any other man. If he left any record of their religious intercourse, I have never heard of it. It would be very precious if we had it, for he could have told much that those of sympathizing faith would rejoice to know. What he said in confidential conversation, however, may not now be repeated.

The sorest trial of Mr. Lincoln's life while President was the loss of his son Willie. I do not think he ever recovered from the shock. During the illness of the boy an experienced nurse was procured from the hospital at Alexandria to take care of him. She was a widow, whose only son was in the army. She was from Boston, and had been for years a member of the Rev. Dr. Baron Stowe's church. In a public meeting in 1862, soon after the event,

at which Dr. Stowe presided, by his invitation a gentleman related in my hearing a story, of which a few particulars only can be briefly stated. After giving what is already written, he went on to say that the nurse felt it to be her duty to her little patient not only to care for his body, but to minister to his spiritual wants as well. So, as opportunity presented, she told him of the love of the Saviour and prayed with him. On one of these occasions, about midnight, and while on her knees at his bedside, she was startled by the noiseless entrance of the President, who had come to say goodnight to his dying boy. The nurse, somewhat alarmed, not knowing his religious views, and fearful that he might disapprove of her acts, began to make an explanation or apology. The President took her by the hand, and, with tearful eyes, told her that he was very thankful for her faithfulness in the care of his son, but especially so for the interest she manifested in the welfare of his soul; that the subject of religion was one of great interest to him, and he deeply regretted that his heavy cares and labors prevented him from giving to it all the consideration he desired.

In the light of these and similar considerations, how futile seem such questions as, "Was Lincoln a Christian?" If a life devoted to the welfare of his fellow-men, with a heart throbbing with sympathy and love for the suffering and down-trodden everywhere, pursuing his steadfast course with Abrahamic faith in God and truth, and following the right with the spirit of the martyrs of old, who, though they saw displayed before them against a stormy sky the bloody cross or flaming stake, still pressed undaunted along the way—if all these be taken as evidence of true discipleship, then his name, too, finds fitting place in that Pauline list of saints of whom it is written, "The world was not worthy." If, on the other hand, Christianity be not a life, but a creed, a dogma, may God have mercy on him and on the rest of us.

But, dismissing all these and similar questions, whatever may be the conclusion as to this or that particular phase of his character, it goes without contradiction that the judgment of mankind has recorded his name in ineffaceable characters among the greatest of men. But in what did his greatness consist? In breadth and profundity of intellect there were many with whom he associated who might be ranked as his superiors. Of that culture and mental discipline which the classic studies of a college course supply he

had none. In what, then, was he so great? If there is any one word which can express the answer, it is *integrity*. Or, to elaborate the thought, in the language of another, and in better phrase than I can frame, the secret of his transcendent greatness was "the moral grandeur of" his "independent integrity."

The great lesson, then,—the richest heritage he has left for us and for the ages to come,—emphasized and illustrated by his own radiant life, is this: He who would be truly great must be truly good, and he who is truly good is great already.

Alban Jasper Conant